What Is the National Federation of the Blind?

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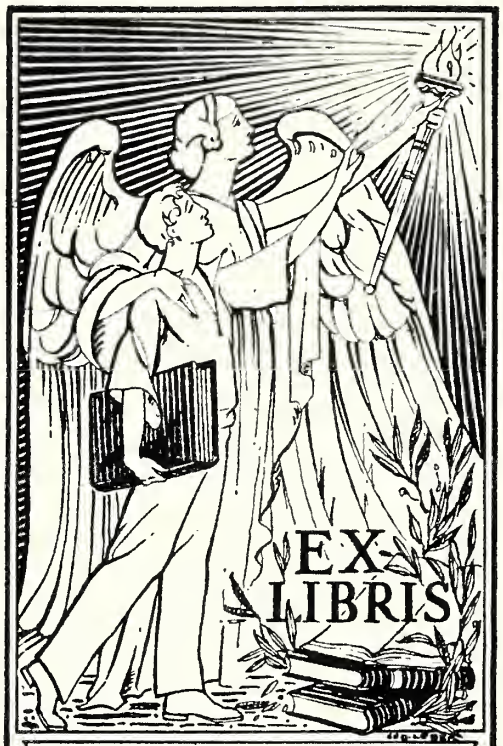

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WHAT IS THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND?

The National Federation of the Blind is the only nation-wide organization of blind people in America open to all persons without sight. While there are some other groups made up of blind persons, they are either restricted in scope or limited to those with a special status -- such as blind veterans or blind professional people. Only the National Federation is representative of blind men and women in all walks of life and all parts of the land. It was established in 1940 upon the principle that the blind themselves should unite and take the leadership in solving their common problems. No other agency or group can legitimately claim to speak for the blind men and women of this country. They are citizens, with the right to speak for themselves through their own organization.

WHAT IS THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND?

The four corner-stones of Federation philosophy are: (1) that blind people are essentially normal people, and that blindness is not in itself a mental or psychological handicap but only a physical nuisance; (2) that all discriminations against the blind -- legal, economic, and social -- which flow from the misconception of blindness as more than a physical disability must be abolished in favor of complete equality of opportunity for all who are blind; (3) that because of their personal experience with blindness, the blind themselves are qualified to lead the way in solving their own problems; and (4) that the general public must be made aware of those problems and urged to participate in their solution. It is upon these foundations of democratic philosophy that the National Federation of the Blind has been built.

WHAT IS THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND?

As its name implies, the organization is nation-wide, it is a federation, and it is primarily composed of blind people. The pattern of organization varies somewhat

from state to state, but in general it is as follows:

A group of adult blind people in a particular locality (a county or perhaps a city) come together and form an organization. They elect officers, write a constitution, and begin to hold regular meetings, usually monthly. There is no definite uniformity of name for these local groups, but they are generally called The _____ County Association (or sometimes Club or Chapter) of Adult Blind.

All of these local groups combine to make up a state organization. Again, there is no standardized designation, but the following are typical: The Lone Star State Federation of the Blind, the Washington State Association of the Blind, The Associated Blind of Massachusetts, The Wisconsin Council of the Blind. These state organizations hold annual conventions, at which officers and boards of directors are elected for one or two-year terms.

The state organizations combine to make up the National Federation of the Blind, which conducts a four-day annual convention, usually during July. Every member of each local group is automatically a member of the state organization and also of the National Federation, with the right to make or second motions, propose nominations, serve on committees and be elected to office. Not only delegates or members, but all blind persons in attendance, may participate in all convention discussions as a matter of right. Voting at conventions is carried out by states, with each state entitled to one vote on any issue.

The national officers of the Federation -- the president, first vice-president, second vice-president, secretary, and treasurer -- are elected for two-year terms by a majority vote of the states at the national convention. The officers, together with eight other elected members, constitute the Executive Committee; and this group, plus three additional members elected from time to time, make up the Federation's board of directors. The board, whose members are usually officers in their respective state organizations, is widely representative of the blind of the nation.

The national convention is the supreme authority of the National Federation of the Blind -- in effect its legislature, with final power of decision on all matters of policy. Decisions are made only after opportunity has been afforded for full and fair discussion. Consistent with the democratic character of the Federation, its conventions are conducted so as to prevent any interference with the expression of the will of the majority on any question, as well as to protect the rights of the minority to complete presentation of its views. The national convention is not merely a gathering of representatives of the separate state groups; it is a meeting of the Federation at the national level in its character as a national organization.

The annual conventions, held every year in a different location, are attended not only by official delegates from the affiliates but by blind men and women from all over the land. In 1956, for example, 704 persons registered for the San Francisco convention; in the following year more than 800 traveled to New Orleans for the annual session, and in 1958 upwards of 900 people were on hand at Boston to participate in the convention which marked the 18th anniversary of the National Federation.

The Executive Committee is the governing body of the Federation between conventions, with the responsibility of making policies when necessary and not in conflict with decisions adopted by the convention -- and when such decisions cannot be postponed until the next meeting of the convention. The Federation's constitution requires that the Executive Committee meet at least three times during the year: in the fall, in the spring, and at the time of the convention. At its fall meeting the Committee adopts the budget of the Federation for the ensuing year. It also serves as a credentials committee, and is empowered to deal with organizational problems submitted to it by any affiliate.

The President is the principal administrative officer

of the Federation. He presides at conventions and carries out the policies there adopted; conducts the day-to-day management of the Federation's affairs; appoints committees; hires, fires and assigns duties to staff members, and generally coordinates and supervises the work of committees, other officers and members of the organization.

ARE THERE ORGANIZATIONS OF THE BLIND IN EVERY STATE?

No, but the number is increasing rapidly and only four states remain unaffiliated. When the Federation was established in 1940, there were only seven state organizations attached to it. There are now forty-five.

MAY SIGHTED PEOPLE BECOME MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND?

Yes. Many of the most valuable members of the National Federation are sighted persons. It is, however, true that in order for a local or state organization to continue in good standing its president, its vice-presidents, and a majority of its board of directors and of its voting members must be blind. Interested sighted persons are urged and requested to join.

ARE ALL OF THE NATIONAL OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS OF THE FEDERATION BLIND?

Yes.

HOW MANY MEMBERS DOES THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND CURRENTLY HAVE?

Since the Federation is the combined membership of all the affiliated state and local organizations of the blind throughout the country, no exact answer to this question can be given, but the best available figures indicate that the Federation now has approximately forty thousand members.

RADIO, TELEVISION, AND NEWSPAPERS SOMETIMES REFER TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS THAN THE FEDERATION AS "NATIONAL BLIND GROUPS." WHAT SIGNIFICANCE DOES THIS HAVE, AND ARE THERE REALLY OTHER NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OF THE BLIND?

The significance of such statements is merely to emphasize the widespread lack of information existing among the public today concerning the blind and their problems. The National Federation of the Blind is the only nation-wide organization of blind people in America open to all who are blind. It is the blind speaking for themselves. No other group can legitimately claim to represent them.

WHAT ARE ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE BLIND, AND HOW DO THEY DIFFER FROM ORGANIZATIONS OF THE BLIND?

There are in the United States today numerous organizations for the blind. They are generally public or private agencies engaged in work for the blind, or organizations sponsored by civic or religious groups to carry on welfare or recreational programs: for example, rehabilitation agencies, guide dog schools, sheltered workshops, social work agencies, and so on. There are also professional organizations composed of workers within these agencies, several of which are national or regional in scope.

Although they often render valuable and badly needed services, obviously such organizations cannot speak for the blind but only for their respective agencies or programs. Frequently they contain many sincere people working devotedly for the good of the blind, and often they give expression to a philosophy of equality, independence and self-support for the blind; but unfortunately there are strong forces working in an opposite direction within most such organizations. Agencies concerned with the dispensation of aids and services, or with supervision over the affairs of blind people, rarely can be expected to encourage the independence of their "wards" from such services and surveillance.

Organizations of the blind actively seek to enlist the support and cooperation of organizations for the blind in all their program objectives, and in numerous states and communities (as will be shown later) such collaboration is close and fruitful. Nevertheless, far-reaching differences in philosophy and outlook all too often remain.

A graphic example of this philosophical difference may be found in a statement of Mr. M. Robert Barnett, Executive Director of the American Foundation for the Blind, one of the largest private agencies doing work for the blind in the United States. On page 12 of the Pinebrook Report, an official publication of the American Foundation, he writes: "A job, a home, and the right to be a citizen will come to the blind in that generation when each and every blind person is a living advertisement of his ability and capacity to accept the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. Then we professionals will have no problem of interpretation because the blind will no longer need us to speak for them, and we, like primitive segregation, will die away as an instrument which society will include only in its historical records." (Emphasis added.)

The National Federation of the Blind believes that the blind are citizens now. They are an average cross-section of society, exactly like other people except that they cannot see. They are citizens under the Constitution of the United States and are entitled to all the privileges and responsibilities of citizens. Their physical disability does not constitute a mental or psychological handicap requiring professional agency workers to interpret their needs to the community or to speak for them. In short, the blind have the right and the competence to speak for themselves through their own organizations, and no outside group -- however well-meaning -- has the right to presume to speak for them.

That a fundamental difference of viewpoint and objective exists between organizations of the blind and some, at least, of the organizations for the blind is revealed in a recent published statement by the managing editor of a national journal for workers with the blind, The New

Outlook for the Blind: "Principally the concern about agency-client relationships has centered on the custodial-paternalistic tendency in service to blind people, which is to an extent an inherent natural concomitant of any program in which society provides a service for its minority of less favored members, be the minority based on blindness or on any other cause or condition. . . . The problem of the custodialism and paternalism has been reduced, to the extent that its inherent nature permits, by those of society's agencies which are in the forefront of progress. . . . Still, to expect society to be completely free of all suggestion of difference between the beneficiary of service and the rest of society is probably visionary, given human nature as it is." (Emphasis added.)

DO ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE BLIND HAVE BLIND MEMBERS?

They occasionally contain at least a few blind members, often in positions of some prominence; but membership is not determined by blindness but by professional or other special qualifications reflecting the special interest of the group. Many such organizations, however, such as the American Foundation for the Blind, are not genuine membership groups.

ARE BLIND STAFF MEMBERS OF AGENCIES DOING WORK FOR THE BLIND ELIGIBLE FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE NATIONAL FEDERATION?

Yes. Since the Federation is for all blind people, blind staff members of agencies doing work for the blind are welcomed. Some of the Federation's most loyal members are agency employees. They recognize the fact that the agencies for which they work -- or which they sometimes head -- cannot speak for the blind, but that they as individual blind people have the right and duty to make their voices heard in the national organization of the blind. When they do so, they are speaking as individual blind persons and not as representatives of their agencies.

WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND?

The ultimate goal of the Federation is the complete integration of the blind into society on a basis of equality. This involves the removal of legal, economic, and social discriminations; the education of the public to new concepts concerning blindness; and the achievement by each and every blind person of the right to exercise to the full his individual talents and capacities. It means the right of the blind to work along with their sighted fellows in the professions, common callings, skilled trades, and regular occupations.

WHAT IS THE FEDERATION DOING TOWARD THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THIS GOAL?

The Federation is working toward the achievement of this goal through many programs and projects. In general its activities may be divided into three broad areas of endeavor: legal reforms, public education, and work with blind people on an individual or organizational basis.

WHAT DOES THE FEDERATION DO IN THE LEGAL AREA?

Constructive legislation is proposed and supported at all levels of government, and constant efforts are made to repeal or modify laws which discriminate against the blind. The Federation maintains a permanent staff in Washington, D.C.

In addition to legislation the Federation does other work in the legal area. Federal, state, and local laws and regulations concerning programs for the blind are studied; and blind individuals are informed of services available to them and of their rights under the law and are assisted with appeals when necessary. A consultative service is maintained to assist state and federal administrators in setting up or re-evaluating programs for the blind, and test cases are sponsored in the courts to promote and establish the rights of the blind.

WHAT DOES THE FEDERATION DO IN THE AREA OF PUBLIC EDUCATION?

Many people still consider the blind to be a helpless and dependent class, unable to compete with their sighted fellows in regular trades and professions, and requiring shelter and care. This view is commonly held by employers -- public and private -- by welfare workers, by administrators of programs for the blind, and by the man in the street.

The Federation seeks to eradicate this view and to replace it with one that pictures the blind as they actually are -- normal people with varying aptitudes and abilities. To accomplish this objective the Federation issues a continuous stream of information and analysis:

Speeches about the nature of blindness are made on radio and television. News items dealing with the accomplishments of individual blind people are released to the press. Federation reports investigating and evaluating programs for the blind are made public and explained. Annual conventions are fully used to publicize the significant achievements of the blind. Scholarly research and publications dealing with the problems of the blind are supported and conducted by the Federation.

On all these fronts the Federation seeks to educate the public, an undertaking of far greater importance than any other of its programs or activities, an undertaking the success of which determines the ultimate success of the Federation. The process of public education may be, and often is, slow and difficult; but in the end it is translated into jobs for blind people and into their eventual social and economic integration.

WHAT IS THE FEDERATION DOING IN THE AREA OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL WORK WITH BLIND PEOPLE?

Public attitudes about the blind frequently become the attitudes of the blind themselves. Like other people, those who are blind tend to see themselves as others see

them. Too often they accept the stereotyped popular opinion of their limitations, and thus do much to make that opinion a reality.

If the blind are to achieve their ultimate goal of complete social and economic integration on a basis of equality, the individual blind person must be brought to a correct understanding of the nature of his disability and, most important of all, of the reality of his abilities and possibilities. To the accomplishment of this purpose the National Federation directs a substantial portion of its activity.

Educational material, factual reports, and informative announcements are regularly distributed by the Federation. Blind people are informed of developments in state and federal programs for the blind, of newly opening fields of employment, of significant achievements by blind individuals, and of all events of interest to the sightless. A major carrier of news reports and articles bearing on these matters is The Braille Monitor, a monthly publication of the National Federation distributed free to the blind in Braille form and also published in a separate ink-print edition. The state affiliates of the Federation are encouraged to perform a vital role in organizational functions through the formation of credit unions, publications, and other activities operated by their blind members as well as for them.

It has been said that the National Federation is the country's most effective "rehabilitation" agency for the blind, by virtue of its many and varied channels for self-expression, collective self-government, and broad participation at all levels in the forward movement of the organized blind. Most of all, perhaps, the regular national and state conventions offer unparalleled opportunity for thousands of blind men and women to take part directly in the joint enterprise of their own organizations; and in manifold other ways they are stimulated to become productive citizens and contributing members of their social group, their community, and their society.

In addition, Federationists seek to make contact with newly blind persons and to give them help with problems of adjustment, as well as to demonstrate by actual example that blindness need not mean dependence but is no more than a physical nuisance. Federation representatives travel to all parts of the country to work with local blind groups and to help form new organizations. When the rights of blind persons are threatened, the Federation conducts legal appeals and furnishes other assistance. As a result of Federation activity, blind people have been helped in obtaining scholarships, securing business loans, and overcoming discrimination in home loans and insurance. Officers and members of the Federation, within the limits of their time and available resources, aid individual blind persons in preparing for and finding remunerative employment.

One of various Federation projects in this area is a proposed Study on Employment and Employability of the Blind, inaugurated in 1956 by the national convention under the supervision of a committee of Federation members expert in the employment field. The committee is presently engaged in the mapping and exploration of a long-range survey of the economic and occupational capacities of blind people, the hazards of prejudice and discrimination faced by the blind in employment, and the possibilities of overcoming these barriers and expanding vocational opportunities in the full range of normal trades and professions.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE FEDERATION?

Three examples would be the Civil Service Story, the Report Concerning the Employment of the Blind in the Teaching Profession, and the Nevada Story. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

WHAT IS THE CIVIL SERVICE STORY?

Before 1948, the blind -- with only a few minor exceptions in limited classifications -- were systematically excluded from taking Federal Civil Service examinations.

They were regarded as generally incompetent and not capable of regular government employment. The attitude of the Civil Service Commission during the 1940's can best be illustrated by quotations from two of its war-time pamphlets. In the first it said: "The blind are especially proficient in manual occupations requiring a delicate sense of touch. They are well suited to jobs which are repetitious in nature." In the second it stated: "The placement of persons who are blind presents various special problems. Small groups of positions in sheltered environment, involving repetitive work, were surveyed in government establishments and were found to have placement potentialities for the blind."

In 1948 Congress passed a law sponsored by the Federation stipulating that handicapped persons could not be denied the right to take Federal Civil Service examinations unless in the discretion of the Federal Civil Service Commission sight was absolutely indispensable to the performance of the duties of the jobs in question. The Civil Service Commission evaded the spirit of this law by declaring in effect that sight was indispensable to all jobs in the Federal Service, and the blind continued to be excluded.

In 1950, as the result of a mistake made by a regional office, a blind lawyer named Russell Kletzing was permitted to take an examination, which he passed. Some weeks later officials in the Washington office discovered the mistake and removed Kletzing's name from the list, on the ground that sight was indispensable to the performance of the job in question. In the meantime Kletzing had been employed to do exactly the same job by another branch of the Federal Government not covered by Civil Service, a job at which he demonstrated very successful performance.

Because of the obvious discrimination involved and the implication for future blind applicants seeking Civil Service positions, the Federation took this case to court and asked that the Commission be ordered to restore Kletzing's name to the register. A list of more than one hundred successfully practicing blind lawyers was collected, and the Federation had every prospect of winning its case.

Then, four days before the trial date, the Commission abolished the entire register and asked the court to dismiss the case on the ground that it was now a moot question, since Kletzing's name could not be restored to a register which no longer existed. The court decided in favor of the Commission, and the case was dismissed. The Federation then appealed to a higher court but in 1953 the case was again dismissed.

The Federation did not lose its battle, however; much publicity had been given to the case, and much congressional interest had been aroused. The Civil Service Commission began to change its policy. In the fall of 1953 the Commission announced that one Civil Service examination would be open to the blind, the Junior Management Assistant examination. Since this is probably the hardest examination given by Federal Civil Service (the qualifications are exceedingly high, and only five per cent of the applicants customarily pass), there was some speculation as to the Commission's motives. If no blind person could qualify or if none could pass, the Commission could say that its long-standing argument was proved.

The Federation sent announcements and bulletins to the blind all over the nation, urging them to make application and take the examination. The test was given late in 1953. Of the sighted who took the examination three per cent passed. Of the blind who took the examination six per cent passed.

In 1954 the Federation began to work with the Civil Service Commission to draw up plans for opening many categories to the blind, in trades as well as in professions; and several blind people were employed as a result. Even so, it was necessary to launch a new appeal late in 1954.

A blind chemist, Dr. Richard Wilburn, was placed on the Federal Civil Service rolls. Later his name was removed from the register, solely on the grounds of his blindness. The Federation appealed to the Civil Service Commission. In the meantime, as in the Kletzing case, Wilburn had secured a job, doing exactly the things which the Commission had said that a blind man could not do. He

was employed as a research chemist at the Morse Laboratories in Sacramento, California.

Late in 1955, the Commission reversed its stand and returned Wilburn's name to the register. On March 5, 1956, he was employed under Civil Service by the Army Chemical Corps to do research chemistry at the Military Proving Grounds at Dugway, Utah. He has been on the job ever since.

During 1955 three blind persons in the State of Tennessee applied to take the Federal Civil Service examination for telephone switchboard operator. They were proficient in the use of the Braille switchboard attachment, which enables a blind person to operate a regular board without difficulty. Despite this fact, their applications were rejected, solely on grounds of blindness. The president of the Tennessee Federation of the Blind then contacted the national office of the Federation, and negotiations were begun with Federal Civil Service officials in Washington.

By this time the Federation's reputation for accuracy and success in Civil Service cases was such that from the very beginning the federal officials were interested. Evidence was presented that many blind persons are now employed by state governments and in private industry as switchboard operators. Pictures were shown of Joe Abel, president of the Arizona affiliate of the Federation, operating a large board at the Douglas Aircraft plant in Tucson, where he is regularly employed.

The federal officials were thoroughly convinced and indicated a willingness to open the regular register to the blind. This necessitated the devising and proper evaluation of tests and testing techniques. Late in 1956 the Federation and the Civil Service Commission began to work together on a joint program. First, examinations were given to blind persons in the Washington, D.C., and Baltimore areas. Then a project for the weighting and evaluation of the results was set up in Chicago in cooperation with Illinois Rehabilitation officers, who have pioneered in training and placing blind persons as switchboard operators.

In the fall of 1958 the United States Civil Service Commission announced for the first time that blind persons were eligible for positions as telephone switchboard operators in the federal service. Thus more than two and one-half years of joint effort and research by the Federation and the Commission ended in a victory for the blind which may well be the forerunner of similar progressive action by state, county and municipal governments throughout the nation -- affording competitive job opportunities for many hundreds of blind men and women.

The contact which the Civil Service Commission has had with the Federation for more than ten years and the observation by the Commission of blind persons actually on the job have had their effects. Let anyone who believes that public education is impossible and that attitudes cannot be changed compare the following quotations from a pamphlet issued by the Commission in 1956 with the two quotations from the wartime pamphlets previously referred to: "Sometimes a mistaken notion is held that . . . the blind can do work only where keenness of vision is not important in the job. The truth appears to be that the blind can do work demanding different degrees of keenness of vision on the part of the sighted. If there is any difference in job proficiency related to a degree of keenness of vision required for the sighted, it is this: the blind appear to work with greater efficiency at jobs where the element is present to a noticeable extent in the sighted job than where vision is only generally useful."

This statement was made as the result of almost two years of intensive study and observation by the Testing and Standards Division. Step by step the Federation has worked with the Civil Service Commission to the point where it can fairly be said that the Commission itself is exercising considerable leadership in broadening the horizons of employment for the blind. This is being done through the Commission's continuing re-examination of jobs and classifications with a view to opening new positions to the blind.

This progress is only relative, however; for new appeals and negotiations are constantly required. As an example, a blind electrician named Jack Polston was denied

the right to take a Civil Service examination in 1956. His application was rejected solely on grounds of blindness. He is presently employed as a journeyman electrician in private employment in Costa Mesa, California. He is receiving regular union wages for full time work.

The battle is still not won, but the Federation is gradually winning for the blind the right to be considered as individuals and not merely rejected as an inferior class.

I AM A BLIND PERSON. I HAVE NEVER APPLIED FOR A CIVIL SERVICE JOB, AND I HAVE NO INTENTION OF APPLYING FOR ONE. AM I BENEFITED BY THE FEDERATION'S ACTION WITH REGARD TO CIVIL SERVICE?

Yes. You are a direct beneficiary of the Federation's action, even if you have other employment and have been unaware of the National Federation of the Blind. Every time a blind person obtains a job in regular competitive enterprise, the general level of public understanding and attitudes toward the blind is raised, however slightly. The once all but universal belief that the blind are incompetent and helpless is thereby still further diminished. All the ancient superstitions of popular folklore -- that blind people are gifted with extraordinary powers, that they are all musical, that they are unusually religious, that they are inspirational, that they are more to be pitied than rehabilitated -- are thereby weakened, and the plain truth is reaffirmed that blind people are peculiar in no respect and are different only in one: the physical lack of sight.

Did you ever enter a room and have a hush come over the crowd? Was the person with you ever asked, "Does he take cream in his coffee?" Were you ever practically lifted on or off a bus? Has anyone ever avoided the word "see" in your presence? Have you ever been treated as if you were a child or had people shout when addressing you? Not only are these social discriminations but they are also symptoms of public attitudes about blindness, and every blind person has experienced many of them.

When the Federation collected a list of over 100

successfully practicing blind lawyers in this country; when it publicized the fact that such a list had been collected; when it sponsored and publicized the Kletzing, Wilburn, telephone switchboard and Polston cases; and finally, when Kletzing, Wilburn, and others were actually employed, every blind person was benefited. The benefits can be enumerated:

1. Those who come into contact with these people on their jobs will learn from first-hand experience of the normality of the blind, and the attitudes acquired will be passed on to friends.

2. Other blind people have been and will be hired in civil service as a result of Federation activity, and the process of public education will be repeated and magnified.

3. Labor leaders, employers, and the man on the street will come to know and be affected by the fact that the blind are filling new jobs.

It is in this way that the legal, social, and economic discriminations, and the symptoms to which they give rise, will be eliminated. The Federation's action with regard to civil service has benefited every blind person. It has benefited you.

WHAT IS THE REPORT CONCERNING THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE BLIND IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION?

Before 1945 the blind of California were systematically rejected as applicants for teaching credentials. Form 41-C, issued by the California Commission of Credentials, required that sight in the better eye should be at least 20/40 with no evidence of progressive loss.

In 1945 the California Council of the Blind, the Federation's state affiliate, secured passage of a law providing that no person otherwise qualified could be denied the right to receive credentials on the ground that he was totally or partially blind. In 1949 the state university cited the language of Form 41-C, which was still being used, as the reason for attempting to prevent the certification of a blind applicant. When

the Federation protested, the Commission replied that the forms then in use had been printed prior to 1945, but that as soon as the current stock was exhausted, new forms not containing the illegal language would be printed.

In 1953 the California Council appointed a committee to study all aspects of the employment of the blind in the teaching profession. School officials throughout the state were contacted, and statistics were gathered from all parts of the nation. The committee made its final report in April of 1955. The following things were learned:

1. Form 41-C was still in use in 1955.

2. No blind people were employed as regular elementary or secondary teachers in California at the time of the report.

3. In many other states blind people are teaching successfully in regular public school classes. Ohio alone has sixteen.

4. Most school officials in California do not know that the blind can be credentialed or that they are capable of teaching in regular classes, but many of them express a willingness to approach the matter with open minds.

Many things have resulted from this report. It has been circulated widely throughout the country and thus has been the means of considerable public education. It was used by the organized blind of Louisiana in 1956 in their attempt to get Louisiana State University to admit blind students to teacher training courses. It was a major factor in the appointment of two blind persons as regular public school teachers in the State of Georgia, one in 1956 and the other in 1957. In California steps are being taken to compel the credentials commission to revise Form 41-C, and blind students are being informed of the success of blind teachers elsewhere. Most important of all, there is concrete evidence that the barriers are beginning to crumble. By 1958 there were, in California alone, twelve blind teachers of regular classes in the public schools, plus several blind teachers of adult education at the college or university level.

WHAT IS THE NEVADA STORY?

Before 1953 the blind of Nevada were almost completely unorganized. There was a small club in Las Vegas, led by Marion Keele, an able and devoted blind veteran of World War I, and there had been various organizational efforts made by the blind of the Reno area. There were few state programs for the blind. Public assistance, particularly, was administered on a very meager basis.

In the early 1950's the National Federation of the Blind began to work cooperatively with Mr. Keele and the Reno leaders. Organizational activity among the blind of Nevada was set in motion. A united chapter was formed in Reno, and a state-wide association was organized, which became an affiliate of the Federation. Efforts were undertaken to improve public assistance legislation. A model statute was drafted by the officers of the Federation, and the Nevada leaders procured its introduction into the Nevada Legislature. The Nevada blind leaders and representatives of the national office of the Federation appeared before committees of the State Legislature and otherwise explained the measure to senators and assemblymen. Finally the bill was enacted, virtually as introduced. Governor Russell, who had been interested in the bill earlier and who had participated in its passage through the Legislature, signed it in a public ceremony in which full recognition was given to the part played by the organized blind.

Since its passage this public assistance legislation has been well administered according to its constructive and generous spirit by Nevada's State Director of Public Welfare, Mrs. Barbara Coughlan, who has continuously consulted and worked with the organized blind movement. In fact, Nevada provides a fine example of just how much can be accomplished by such cooperative action.

In 1957 the Federation succeeded in getting the Nevada Legislature to establish a separate program of rehabilitation for the blind. Before this time rehabilitation for the blind had been almost non-existent in the state. It had been a very small and insignificant part of the general rehabilitation

program carried on by the Department of Education. The program is now being administered by the State Welfare Department and is being coordinated with other services for the blind.

The Federation was also able to demonstrate to the 1957 Nevada Legislature the need for a home teaching service for the blind, and funds were voted for the establishment of a program. The home teaching service is also located in the welfare department, and work for the blind in the state is now better administered and coordinated than it has ever been.

The Federation's role in improving the conditions of the blind of Nevada has been all important. The director of the welfare department said in a public statement in August of 1957:

"As an administrator I have found the Nevada Federation of the Blind a valued source of assistance in administering services for the blind. Its activities have been a key factor in the growth and improvement of our programs during the past few years.

"The adoption of the aid to the blind program by the Nevada legislature in 1953 was due largely to the efforts of the Federation. This program, financed by the federal and state governments, replaced the state-county financed Blind Pensions which had been established in 1925. The new program provided for more adequate assistance to over twice as many blind persons as had been helped formerly.

"From the first, the Federation has provided helpful counsel and advice to the Department. One means has been through its representation on the State Aid to the Blind Advisory Committee. This committee has assisted in recommending policy and legislation as well as in interpreting the program to the public and, in turn, reporting to the Department community reaction to the program. With regard to the latter, the Department has enjoyed the benefit of having available the defined position of the organized blind in relation to programs administered on their behalf. As an administrator

I would be handicapped seriously if there were not such an organized group. I feel it is of the utmost importance to know how the persons served feel about the services provided and how such services can be improved. The Federation of the Blind has been an excellent vehicle for this purpose. Our relationship has been one of mutual confidence and respect.

"Last year Governor Charles H. Russell asked the National Federation of the Blind to study all programs for the Blind in Nevada and make recommendations for their improvement, as well as evaluation of their current functioning. A three-man team from the Executive Board of the Federation came to Nevada and stayed several weeks. They read departmental records, studied our case files, interviewed staff, traveled all over the state to talk with individual blind persons, and met with Lions Club members and parents of blind children. The report of the survey made by the Federation contained a number of legislative recommendations, all of which were enacted at the last session of the legislature. The minimum amount of need, as provided by law, for each eligible individual was increased from $75 to $90 a month. The Federation's study also pointed out that Nevada was the only Western State without home teaching service for the Blind. As a result the position of Fieldworker was established by law to assist 'blind persons in achieving physical and psychological orientation' and 'social and economic independence.' The enactment of such legislation is to be attributed, in my opinion, to the fact that almost the entire membership of the Nevada Federation took an active and personal part in the effort, in one way or another.

"It has been my privilege to be invited to attend local, state and national meetings of the Federation. I also have had many informal discussions with officers and members of the group. I have found these opportunities invaluable for the purpose of working together on problems of joint concern in order to achieve our common goal -- improved services for the Blind."

HOW DOES THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND FINANCE ITS ACTIVITIES?

The Federation must exercise extreme care in raising funds, for it promotes the very misconceptions it is trying to defeat if people give money for its support out of pity or because they think the blind are helpless. The Federation has three principal means of raising money: Dues from its affiliated state organizations and individual members, National White Cane Week, and a mass mail appeal including the use of seals and a greeting card campaign.

WHAT ARE THE DUES OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND?

Each affiliated state organization pays $10 a year for each million or major fraction of a million of state population. Thus if a state has 2,600,000 people, the dues of the affiliate in that state will be $30 a year. Individual members of affiliated state organizations do not pay dues directly to the national office.

Blind persons in states which do not have a Federation affiliate may join the Federation individually. The dues are $1.00 per year. Blind persons in states which have affiliates must join their state organizations if they wish to become members of the National Federation.

WHAT IS NATIONAL WHITE CANE WEEK?

The third week in May of each year is set aside by the blind as National White Cane Week. It is a week of education and of fund-raising. During this time the community at large is informed through radio, television, newspapers, speeches, and personal appearances of what the blind are achieving, and of their hopes and aspirations. The general public is asked to join with the Federation in making the blind "tax producers instead of tax consumers." They are asked for a "hand up, not a hand out." Letters and descriptive material about the Federation are also mailed.

White Cane Week is largely conducted by the state

organizations. Half of the proceeds from each state customarily go to the national office. White Cane Week was inaugurated in 1947.

WHY WAS THE WHITE CANE CHOSEN AS THE SYMBOL OF THE FEDERATION'S EDUCATIONAL AND FUND RAISING WEEK?

The White Cane symbolizes the independence of the blind. With a cane a blind person can travel by himself anywhere he pleases. Without the ability to travel he cannot go to and from a job. He cannot be truly self-supporting.

WHAT IS WHITE CANE DAY, AND IS IT SPONSORED BY THE FEDERATION?

White Cane Week is not to be confused with White Cane Day. The latter is used as a time of fund raising by many Lions Clubs throughout the country. The one exception to this is Minnesota where the Minnesota Organization of Blind has conducted a White Cane Day for the past fifteen years. The Lions' White Cane Day is not established on a national basis nor is it conducted with the approval of the National Federation of the Blind. The money thus raised is devoted to projects for the blind which the Lions deem to be helpful. The National Federation and its affiliates do not customarily share in the proceeds collected on White Cane Days, nor do they ordinarily share in the determination of the projects supported by those proceeds. In at least one case, the Lions cooperate with a local blind group in their fund raising activities. The Lions of Southern Nevada actively and devotedly work with the local chapter of the Nevada Federation of the Blind in carrying on the White Cane Week Campaign.

WHAT IS THE FEDERATION'S GREETING CARD CAMPAIGN?

In 1953 the Federation inaugurated a fund raising and educational campaign involving the mailing on approval of greeting cards from a central state's office. These cards are sent all over the United States. Each state organization has the right to determine whether greeting cards will be mailed into its state. Proceeds are divided equally between the national office and the organizations in participating states.

Each box of greeting cards contains descriptive material about the Federation. This material is prepared by the Federation's officers and maintains the same high standards that are employed in White Cane Week.

I AM A BLIND PERSON. WHY SHOULD I JOIN THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND AND SUPPORT ITS ACTIVITIES?

Collectively the blind can achieve goals which they can never reach as individuals. If there had been no Federation there would have been no Civil Service Story, no report concerning the employment of the blind in the teaching profession, no Nevada Story, no effective voice in legislation for the blind, no White Cane Week and only a very limited amount of constructive public education concerning blindness. Without a Federation public assistance for the blind would be even less adequate than it is, rehabilitation would be more limited, and far fewer blind people would be employed. As a blind person you have benefited in many ways from the activities of the Federation even if you have never heard of the organization.

If there is a local affiliate of the Federation in your area, you should join it. It may be weak, it may be strong. Its members may be well-informed and actively working to promote the interests of the blind; they may be almost totally uninformed and meeting primarily for coffee and cake. Its activities may be entirely constructive, or they may be almost non-existent. At times they may be even unintentionally harmful to the best interests of the blind. Its meetings may be interesting; they may be dull. The case is not altered. As a blind person you have a responsibility to join and to work in the organization.

If you do not join, your voice is not heard. In effect, you give someone who holds an opposite view two votes, and you weaken the entire Federation by one member. The organization is denied the benefit of your knowledge, your effort, and your support; you continue to reap the rewards of its work and to be represented by it without a voice in its affairs.

If the organization in your community is good, you

should join and support it. If it is weak or bad, you should join and help to make it better. If there is no organization in your community, you should seek out other blind people and help to form one. If there are no other blind people in your community, you should write to Federation headquarters and join the organization individually.

WHAT ARE THE BILLS CONCERNING THE RIGHT OF THE BLIND TO ORGANIZE?

On June 27, 1957, Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts introduced in the United States Senate S. 2411, "A bill to protect the right of the blind to self-expression through organizations of the blind." Shortly thereafter, Congressman Walter S. Baring of Nevada submitted a companion bill (H.R. 8609) in the House of Representatives. In the month that followed, no less than 60 other congressmen introduced identical bills, which soon became known as the "right to organize" bills for the blind.

WHAT ARE THE EXACT PROVISIONS OF THE RIGHT - TO - ORGANIZE BILL?

The Kennedy-Baring bill reads in its entirety:

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That in the formulation, administration, and execution of programs for the aid and rehabilitation of the blind, the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare shall to the fullest extent practicable consult and advise with authorized representatives of organizations of the blind; and shall, in developing and recommending policies and procedures to State agencies, take such steps as may be appropriate to encourage such agencies to consult with authorized representatives of organizations of the blind in the formulation, administration, and execution of any State program for the aid and rehabilitation of the blind to which Federal funds are contributed.

"Sec. 2. No officer or employee of any Federal, State, or other agency concerned with the administration of

any program for the aid or rehabilitation of the blind to which Federal funds have been contributed shall exert the influence of his office or position against the right of the blind to join organizations of the blind. The Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare shall adopt such regulations and shall condition Federal grants to State or other programs for the blind on such terms as will prevent the exertion of any such influence against self-expression of the blind through organizations of the blind."

WHAT HAS PROMPTED 60 MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TO SPONSOR BILLS SUPPORTING THE RIGHT OF THE BLIND TO ORGANIZE?

The answer is simple -- and surprising. The right of blind men and women to form or join organizations of their own choosing, for purposes of self-expression, has met with concerted opposition on the part of various groups both in and out of government. Moreover, besides the right to organize and to speak for themselves, the right to be heard -- through systematic consultation in the development and execution of policies affecting them -- has been often denied to organizations of the blind by officials of federal and state welfare agencies.

The basic constitutional and human rights involved in this proposed legislation -- rights of self-expression, of free association, of assembly and petition for the blind people of America -- have never been more clearly stated than in the speech delivered by Senator Kennedy on the occasion of the original introduction of his bill:

"Organizations of blind persons exist today in many cities and communities throughout the country. Some of these organizations are community groups, some are alumni groups, some are trade and professional groups, some are associations of vending-stand operators, some are organizations of workshop employees. In most of our States today, organizations of the blind within the State have formed one or more statewide organizations. Forty-three of these statewide organizations of the blind are now federated into a single nationwide organization, the National Federation of the Blind.

"Organizations of this kind have been formed by the blind to advance their own welfare and common interests.

These organizations provide to our blind citizens the opportunity for collective self-expression. Through these organizations, these citizens are able to formulate democratically and voice effectively their views on the programs that our National Government and our State governments are financing for their aid and rehabilitation. It is important that these views be expressed freely and without interference. It is important that these views be heard and considered by persons charged with responsibility for determining and carrying out our programs for the blind.

"In some communities this freedom that each of our blind citizens should have to join, or not to join, organizations of the blind has been prejudiced by a few professional workers in programs for the blind who have allowed their personal views to be expressed in official action for or against particular organizations of the blind. Administrators and workers in welfare programs for the blind possess unusual power to control the lives and influence the conduct of their clients. It is important that our blind citizens be protected against any exercise of this kind of influence or authority to interfere with their freedom of self-expression through organizations of the blind."

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF OPPOSITION TO THESE BILLS PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF THE BLIND TO ORGANIZE, TO SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES, AND TO BE HEARD?

Most of the opposition has come from certain private and public agencies supposedly dedicated to advancing the interests of the blind. The American Association of Workers for the Blind -- a nation-wide organization of approximately 1,000 agency officials and social workers in the field of blind welfare -- passed a resolution at its 1957 convention strongly condemning the Kennedy-Baring bill and urging its defeat. Among other things, the resolution stated that the bill "is not only unnecessary and unjustified but also is a bill which embodies a completely unsound and retrogressive concept of the responsibilities and privileges of blind persons as citizens."

Also in the forefront of opposition to the bills is the

American Foundation for the Blind, one of the nation's largest charitable agencies, which is in no sense a genuine membership organization but exerts a pervasive influence over both public and private programming for the blind. Through the announcements of its executive director (who was quoted earlier) and of its legislative representative, as well as in the pages of its official journal, the American Foundation has expressed vehement opposition not only to the right-to-organize bills but to the principles which they contain.

ARE ALL AGENCIES DOING WORK FOR THE BLIND OPPOSED TO THE RIGHT OF THE BLIND TO ORGANIZE?

No. Quite the contrary. Many state and private agencies work cooperatively with the organized blind movement. In fact in those states where programs for the blind are most advanced, the agencies have come to rely on the Federation for consultation and advice. Mr. John Mungovan, Director of the Massachusetts Division of the Blind, says of the officers of the Federation's Massachusetts affiliate: "They, through their considered judgment and wise planning and full appreciation of the needs of the blind people of the state, have been tremendously helpful to me in administering the state-wide programs. Of all the people with whom I consult from time to time in planning and operating these programs within Massachusetts, I would say that ... Mr. Little and Mr. Ottone are the ones I can always rely upon to give me an unbiased opinion--an opinion of what will be good for the blind people of Massachusetts -- an opinion that is not cluttered up with emotional content and the need for continuing some vested interest. I depend upon the officers of the Associated Blind of Massachusetts, and they always come through without fail."

Harry L. Hines, Director, Services for the Blind, State of Nebraska, says of the Federation in his state: "I would dislike very much, the idea of having to try to develop a satisfactory program for the blind in the state of Nebraska without the very considerable help that I know I can depend upon getting from the organizations of the blind in the state."

Clifford A. Stocker, Administrator, Commission for the Blind, State of Oregon, says of the Oregon affiliate:

"Unfortunately, here in Oregon we have not had the benefit of a long-time existing efficiently working organization of the blind. . . . It is my sincere belief that efficient and well organized responsible groups of blind persons are a very essential factor in the development of better programs of services to blind people for I know of no other source from which I can find an answer as to just what the needs of blind people are than blind people themselves and I realize that to seek these answers from one or two selected blind persons would be an error for it is very likely that any collection of opinions from these few scattered blind people would only result in a conglomeration of conflicting opinions. On the other hand, if blind people have banded themselves together in a responsible organization and if they have accepted the task of discussing their problems and arriving at mutually agreed upon solutions, I can then usually depend upon these people to offer to me as an Administrator competent and integrious advice and suggestions. . . .

". . . I would unalterably oppose any efforts that might be made to restrict the rights and privileges of blind people to organize and to participate in legislation and the development of the program which would purport to serve them for I feel that their participation and their acceptance of responsibility in building a program and its administration are especially essential if we are to really meet the needs of our blind fellow citizens. . . ."

Perry Sundquist, Chief, Division for the Blind, California Department of Social Welfare, says in a letter to the president of the National Federation, dated August 8, 1957:

"For some time now I have wanted to write you concerning the great values accruing to our Social Welfare Programs for the Blind as a direct result of the consultation we have received from the local and state-wide organizations of the blind. These organizations are all affiliated with the National Federation of the Blind.

"During the past sixteen years, the State Division for the Blind has constantly sought, and received, counsel and recommendations from the California Council of the Blind with

respect to proposed regulations to govern the administration of Aid to the Blind. We have also placed copies of the State's Manual of Policies and Procedures in the hands of many organizations of the blind and receive sound suggestions for changes from time to time.

"The happy results of this consultation can be briefly summarized as follows: First, the State has received sound advice concerning the problems and needs of the blind thus enabling us to draft policies and procedures which are not only realistic but are also geared to helping blind persons in their efforts to decrease dependency. Second, the organizations of the blind have undertaken an interpretative program among their members with respect to the responsibilities, as well as the rights, of recipients of Aid to the Blind. This in turn has contributed greatly to a smooth functioning administration of the programs.

"We in California have been particularly fortunate in that blind men and women have had their own organizations for a great many years. Were this not so, we would certainly have sought to create some sort of an advisory committee, since the values derived from close consultation with the blind cannot be obtained from any other source.

"We are greatly in the debt of the organizations of the blind in California for their rich contributions to the administration of this State's Social Welfare Program for the Blind and I would like the National Federation of the Blind to know this."

I AM A PARENT OF A BLIND CHILD. SHOULD I JOIN THE FEDERATION?

Your child's future is affected by every activity and decision of the Federation. It is working for his future as well as for the good of the blind of this generation. If you help remove legal, economic and social discriminations against the blind now, his future will be filled with more opportunities. His chances of success will be better.

I AM AN ORDINARY CITIZEN IN THE COMMUNITY. IS THERE ANY REASON WHY I SHOULD SUPPORT THE FEDERATION?

You will certainly be helping in a worthwhile cause, and you will also probably learn a great deal about blindness and its problems. You will likely find that you have a great many misconceptions about what blindness involves and what its limitations really are. By helping the blind to achieve their ultimate goal you will be helping to swell the ranks of the nation's taxpayers and to reduce the number of its tax-consumers. You will be helping to open a new reservoir of potential talent and ability for contribution to the betterment of our way of life.

HOW CAN I LEARN WHETHER THERE IS A LOCAL ORGANIZATION OF THE BLIND IN MY COMMUNITY OR GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OR SOME PROBLEM CONCERNING BLINDNESS?

You may write to:

Dr. Jacobus tenBroek, President
National Federation of the Blind
2652 Shasta Road
Berkeley 8, California